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ABSTRACT

A formative evaluation was conducted during the first year of a whole language literacy project at Maplewood High School, Ontario, Canada, which serves students who have been diagnosed as functioning below grade level. Interviews were conducted to collect descriptive information from the five Maplewood staff members involved in the project, the school administrators, and the central administrators responsible for the support and implementation of the project about the various aspects of the literacy program. Results indicated that: (1) there was a consistent broad objective held by teachers and school administrators involved in the literacy project; (2) the students involved in the project were in grades seven and eight with a reading ability level of approximately grade two and often little or no writing ability; (3) teachers used an eclectic approach in choosing teaching strategies; (4) the strategies that did not work were varied; (5) some problems arose with peer evaluation; (6) all staff members and school administrators attended staff development activities; (7) the English Language Centre was the major resource used by teachers and school administrators at Maplewood; (8) the objectives will be continued for the second year; (9) there was some uncertainty whether the students in the program in the second year would also include those in grade nine; and (10) most teachers wanted the role of the TSA (Teacher Specially Assigned) to be the same the second year. (RS)

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Research Report

THE LITERACY PROJECT AT MAPLEWOOD HIGH SCHOOL: YEAR 1, 1990-91

Marilyn Hale
Research Associate

#90/91-28

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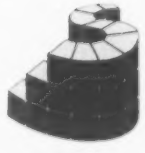

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THE LITERACY PROJECT AT MAPLEWOOD HIGH SCHOOL: YEAR 1, 1990-91

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Research Associate

#90/91-28

June, 1991

Lorna Earl Ph.D., Research Director and General Editor

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INTRODUCTION

Background of the Project

The Scarborough school system includes two schools devoted to basic level programs: Sir William Osler High School and Maplewood High School. These schools provide services for students who have been diagnosed as functioning below level. Maplewood's mission statement emphasizes providing "a supportive environment designed to facilitate a student's development towards being an independent, literate individual, who displays a belief in self, and a respect for others, the environment, and the multicultural community.

It was recognized that, in these schools, the issue of literacy was a central theme that needed to remain in the forefront. To address this issue, a proposal for literacy development at the school was initiated by the committee established for this purpose (chaired by Flora Miller) and approved by the Program Department to begin during the 1990-91 school year. Included in the proposal was a pilot research project, the purpose of which was "to investigate the improvement of literacy levels in the special schools with a view to implementation of such a program in other venues".

In the initial stages of the project, staff from the English Language Centre worked to encourage the school to develop program objectives related to the whole language approach to the teaching of reading. These objectives would then be implemented, with the help of the Teacher Specially Assigned (TSA) to this project.

Once the initial objectives had been outlined, Research Centre staff members were

involved in meetings to help the staff members develop a systematic way of measuring their selected objectives.

At the first of these meetings, held with representatives from the Maplewood staff, it became clear that the innovation would require changes in teaching methods, and that the teachers needed time to work with the TSA to understand the strategies and plan program, before they could consider how to collect data. There was also concern about what was being evaluated, since they were just beginning the literacy project.

The concern expressed by the staff with respect to the research process suggested that evaluation of the impact of the program was premature, since they were still trying to resolve the teaching strategies they would be using in their classrooms related to the whole language objectives they selected.

Since the first year of the project was, indeed, a development year, the research focus became the creation of a description about the implementation of the program by collecting descriptive information from staff and administrators on such topics as teaching strategies, program in the classroom, and resources used. In addition, instrumentation would be collected for later research.

Purposes of the Research

In his book "The Meaning of Educational Change", Michael Fullan (1982) outlined three broad phases of the change process: Phase I is "the process which leads up to and includes a decision to adopt or proceed with a change"; Phase II "involves the first

experiences of attempting to put an idea or program into practice"; and, Phase III refers to "whether the change gets built in as an ongoing part of the system or disappears by way of a decision to discard or through attrition".[1]

Since the literacy project at Maplewood is progressing from Phase I to Phase II, the research component constituted a formative evaluation (the collecting and reporting of information by the researcher to help staff members plan, adjust and improve the program). The research focussed initially on describing the project components and preparing for future research involvement.

Specifically, the research this year addressed the following objectives:

- create relaxed interactions among school staff, Research staff, and Central program staff
- refine the **objectives** selected by the teachers involved in the project
- isolate the particular **questions** to be addressed by future research
- provide input regarding **methods** for collecting data related to the research questions
- establish methods of **summarizing** information collected
- conduct **interviews** with key people involved in the pilot phase of the study to collect information to describe key program components of the innovation as implemented in the school and factors that affect the initial implementation process (e.g., strategies, resources, support, etc.)
- create a **description of the key program components** and the factors that affected the initial year of implementation of the program
- develop a **proposal** for the 1991-92 research project.

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[1]Michael Fullan, The Meaning of Educational Change, (Toronto: OISE Press, The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1982), 39 - 40

METHOD

Interviews were conducted to collect descriptive information from the five Maplewood staff members involved in the literacy project, the administrators of the school, and the central administrators responsible for the support and implementation of the project, about various aspects of the literacy program being introduced at Maplewood. At this point in the implementation of the program, this qualitative research technique was used to help the staff with the process.

Teacher Interviews

The teachers were interviewed once early in 1991, and again toward the end of the school year. The first interview was an informal one done by the researcher who was accompanied by the TSA from the English Language Centre. Discussion centred around the objectives the teachers had established for their classrooms, the methods they were using to implement those objectives, and the methods used to measure whether the students had internalized those objectives.

The second more formal interview was conducted by the researcher and followed a semi-structured format. The results of the second interview (which are summarized in this report) deal not only with the general and specific objectives of the program and the strategies and evaluation methods used, but also with information on problem areas, target students, staff development, role of the TSA, and plans for the 1991-92 school year regarding objectives, students, and the role of TSA. The final question asked the teachers to describe their expectations regarding the research into the literacy project. In addition to answering the questions, they were given the opportunity to provide additional comments.

School Administrators and Program Department Staff Interviews

The principal of Maplewood and the vice-principal involved in the literacy project were interviewed in May, as were the Co-ordinator of the English Language Centre; the Assistant Co-ordinator, English Language JK-6; the Teacher Specially Assigned to the English Language Centre; and, the Associate Superintendent/Program supervising the program.

Interview questions centred around their objectives for the literacy project this year and next, staff development they have received or provided with respect to the project, sources of support/materials they found useful in implementing the program, their perceptions regarding the role of the TSA assigned to the project, what they would like to find out from the research next year, and any other comments they would like to make.

RESULTS

This "Results" section contains the interview data for the three different groups of people who were involved in the literacy project during the 1990-91 school year: **Maplewood teaching staff, Maplewood administrators,** and **Program Department staff** associated with the project. When interpreting the results of the interviews the reader should keep in mind that the themes that emerged reflect the opinions of the participants in the literacy project only and not those of the entire school staff.

The information for each group has been summarized under headings that are the actual questions asked during the interview. In some cases it has been possible to find common themes among respondents; in others, the comments were so varied that they are listed individually.

1. Teacher Interviews

Program Objectives

What do you see as your general objectives for the literacy project this year?

When general objectives for the literacy project were discussed with staff members, it became clear that there was a consistent broad theme which focussed on helping the students become confident, successful readers and writers. In order to accomplish this, they worked with the students to:

- develop confidence in reading since reading, writing, speaking, etc. are all hooked in
- overcome remedial students' reluctance to read and fear of print
- improve attitude toward reading

- improve ability to read and to comprehend
- get them to appreciate and enjoy reading and through this to gain positive self-esteem and pride

Two comments related to writing were:

- develop confidence in writing
- have them write more

Some additional general objectives cited by individual staff members were: encourage students to take risks, help remedial students who already have problems, and make environmental changes (e.g., classroom set up).

In that framework, what <u>specific objectives</u> did you try to address in the literacy program this year?

One of the specific objectives being addressed by most teachers in their classrooms was to develop oral communication:

- oral ability and an enjoyment of reading in students
- ability to explain stories fluently in their own words
- one-to-one conversations with each other as young adults - no screaming and pushing
- ability to present orally

The second objective most staff members were concentrating on was writing:

- develop in students an enjoyment of writing
- develop students' ability to write thoughts rather than speaking them (phonics, syntax)

- have students use computers for writing to create in them the desire to write more
- using computers to improve writing ability

Over half the staff focussed on reading with their students:

- have students enjoy reading and be able to relate literature they read aloud to their own experience (ownership relates)
- expose them to different forms of reading (eg., poetry, short stories, fables)
- use independent reading to find answers (e.g., extra curricular - newspapers, magazines, current affairs)

Comprehension was also addressed by over half the staff interviewed:

- enjoy the stories
- be able to look at stories in different ways (e.g., difference between fantasy and fables)
- improve comprehension ability in students

Two staff members addressed listening as a specific objective:

- increase students' ability to listen, to enjoy it, and then to ask questions
- improve listening skills

In addition to shared specific objectives, additional individual classroom objectives were raised:

- develop confidence - risk taking
- communicate through art

Target Students

Who were the target students?

The students involved in the first year of the literacy project at Maplewood High School were the "transitional students", Grade 7 and 8, ranging in age from 12 to 14, with a reading ability level of approximately Grade 2 and often little or no writing ability. Generally, these students are poor readers selected for reading classes to improve reading ability and attitudes.

In addition, these students tend to be very immature, with very poor self esteem. They have a short attention span, are impatient, and have trouble socializing with people. Often they do not have a "real true" friend.

Generally, they are either very physically active and boisterous or shy, the two extremes with nothing in between. Attention seeking behaviour is dominant and they tend to be antagonistic. Not only do they have trouble talking with someone else on a one-to-one basis for a period of time, but they also are not very co-operative as a group.

Overall, they are students who are dependent learners, need reassurance, and want praise.

Teaching Strategies

What are the strategies that you have been using to implement these objectives.

The Maplewood teachers used many different instructional strategies as part of the literacy initiative. They mentioned some strategies that could apply to any part of the

program:

- act upon student-initiated requests - if they initiate they own it more
- try to be flexible
- students are happiest when the activities are less structured - it requires work at first, but results happen
- classrooms were rearranged to allow a "co-operative desk set up"
- students do assignments together, the "buddy system" - working together is more important than any cheating that might go on and "gives them a friend"
- students co-operated on group stories
- the use of art can be a catalyst (e.g., "kids went crazy" when the administrators were invited in to judge students' paintings)

The teachers also described a range of strategies that they used to implement the specific classroom objectives of oral communication, writing, reading, comprehension, and listening.

Oral Communication

- art became a springboard for oral expression
- oral reports - peer evaluation and self-evaluation (to improve oral expression)
- more discussion, conversations
- work on conversation to get the meaning
- round table discussion on a good quality topic that has been well thought out - not junk
- praising each other's work
- oral presentations by students - improve self-esteem

Writing

- make valentines and express sentiment on hand made cards - use of poetry to express strong feelings
- effective writing using the urban myth to illustrate the power of writing (e.g., twist of an ending)
- computers in two rooms for writing
- write in journals
- free writing, use of writing folders
- taking ideas from draft to final copy

Reading

- shared reading with group activities afterwards
- poetry reading, acting
- looking at stories in a different way than grammar and spelling
- increase in teacher reading
- change in reading materials - magazines
- introduce a wide variety of books
- consistency of teacher reading
- independent reading (free reading period with no instruction to read what they want)
- students read to each other
- administrators read to students

Materials used in implementing these strategies included seven different magazines which the students could read when they finished their work. Newspapers were also introduced as appropriate reading as a part of life. Activities related to articles became

a classroom strategy.

Comprehension

- schematic mapping - students actually draw by hand parts of a story from the information they retained after reading
- thematic approach - reading and understanding - develop topic with a multicognitive approach
- comprehension - novel studies with questions and answers

Listening

- respect for others' opinions
- all of the activities where something is read to the students by teachers, by administrators, or by other students are, in addition to reading objectives, listening objectives

Which strategies appeared to work? How do you know?

Generally, the teachers believed that the strategies that they were using to implement the objectives were working.

Indications That the Strategies Worked

The teachers felt that the students responded to their specific strategies by:

- taking pride in their work, in working together and supporting each other, and in the class as a whole
- being attentive and quiet during reading, asking why reading wasn't done, and wanting to know more
- being more receptive to print and wanting to read
- taking books home, picking up magazines to read (e.g., books and magazines disappeared from the shelves)

- improving the quality of their writing (e.g., vocabulary)
- taking risks and being less shy
- writing more than asked and entering more in journals, with little hesitancy - increasing computer use
- asking to do activities again
- feeling good about themselves
- being interested in getting their results
- displaying more self control in their behaviour and in speaking

Which strategies <u>did not</u> work or should be <u>improved</u>? How do you know?

The teachers were able to isolate the following strategies that they felt did not work with the Maplewood transitional students:

- the "old way" of asking questions for reading comprehension - emphasizing the oral approach worked - students prefer an activity-based approach rather than reading a novel and answering questions - it should be made less formal
- developing class atmosphere was difficult if the teacher did not have a particular classroom (e.g., set up of chairs)
- students were not ready for cloze exercises - they became edgy
- schematic mapping - the teacher felt that he had to develop his skills and patience to a greater degree
- students could not be motivated to do speeches - when asked, they refused
- when the teacher faced the blackboard the students became inattentive - now overheads are used instead of the board
- independent study was difficult with the students since they need a lot of guidance - the class activity changed to a more teacher-directed approach
- seating arrangements were discussed as an issue that has problems but could be improved. If students were required to work in pairs or groups, they would fight, or sit and not really share. The teacher continued to work on their behaviour telling them where this set up is useful and why. They gradually began to work together but do not always produce their best work.

- another seating arrangement that was tried was "U" seating. However, having the students right beside each other in the "U" did not work. When they were changed to every other seat, they seemed to work better.

A general explanation regarding why some strategies did not work centred around the characteristics of the students. This plays a part in the strategies not used. They need a lot of modelling and have to be shown exactly what is expected of them. This has to be reinforced over time.

The students are easily frustrated and become angry often because they want to do well. They need to be engaged first to encourage them to like the subject before anything else can happen. Many elements need to be worked on simultaneously. Once they get going they do enjoy things and can be challenged. The product is still unpredictable.

Measurement Techniques

What methods have you tried for collecting information from students to determine whether they have benefitted from your objectives for the literacy program?

Two major measurement techniques were tried by teachers to assess student progress in the Literacy Project. Under each, various data collection methods were developed:

Teacher Recording

- creating anecdotal reports on student progress
- recording what books students take out and the number of books over time
- charting individual students
- recording marks given for class participation to individual students
- assigning a weekly mark based on attendance, work habits, and co-operation to create a description of student behaviour in addition to written marks

Observation

- observing students in class (e.g., risk-taking behaviour, self-esteem in reading) - seeing their desire to read, attentiveness when teacher reads
- discussing stories in depth while looking for students' levels of understanding, length of sentences and looking for differences between the type of answers given now and earlier in the year
- looking at students' writing - how much and the quality of work; giving general comprehension tests with written answers
- using computers and assessing student's desire to use them

Additional Methods

- assessing students' approach to reading by having them record the topic, article, and whether or not they read it
- inviting the school administrators to the class to judge pictures
- obtaining input from parents re any changes in students
- using students' self evaluation followed by peer evaluation. Findings are then discussed to determine if student self perception is on the mark

What problems did you encounter?

Generally, the measurement methods appeared to work. The ones where there were some problems were:

- didn't have own room which affects classroom set up, books available and the dynamics of students - no regular pattern
- students reluctant to make comments about peers
- had difficulty with evaluation form used to assess peers when asked to list one good thing the students did and how they could improve
- when addressing fluency and "chunking" some students got overload and became resistant to change

- students did not always record what they had read
- didn't understand the purpose of the writing folder, thought it was just for filing things rather than something to be proud of
- hard to get students to make oral presentation - shy
- input from parents did not work because of timing and weather

Which methods seemed to work most efficiently? Samples?

While most methods used were seen as efficient, the question/answer method in written responses and comprehension questions worked best with these students in the end. The "old ways" indicate to students that this is a test and they will sit there and do it.

Using the computer for final copy during the writing process seemed to work better than the hand written copy. Finally, participation of the administration in the classroom had impact on the students.

Sample instruments used by teachers are on file in the Research Centre.

Professional Development and Other Resources

Have you attended any P.A. Day/workshops related to the literacy project? If yes, which ones? If no, why not?

All the staff members have attended staff development activities within Scarborough, and most have gone to Scarborough-wide or Ontario-wide conferences.

School-Based

The school-based staff development was attended by all teachers. The activities included information sharing about approaches and the development of curriculum units (e.g., White Fang). Staff retreats also received a positive staff response.

Scarborough-Based

Most of the literacy workshops for the teachers from Maplewood involved in the literacy project were held at the English Language Centre at G. B. Little. In some cases, presentations were made by people outside Scarborough (e.g., workshops on self-esteem, curriculum writing). Others were run by the Centre's staff on topics such as the writing process; by the ESL staff; or by the Drama staff.

Outside Scarborough

Conferences attended outside Scarborough included: **Reading for the Love of It** (International Reading Association), drama storytelling day (Scarborough College), literacy conference at Le Parc on schematic mapping, and a province-wide Basic Level Conference.

Were you able to integrate the content into your classroom/program? If not, why not?

In most cases, the teachers could integrate some elements from the conferences into their classrooms (e.g., poetry workshop on shared reading regarding line breaks, ESL helped with how students approach language, information regarding motivation techniques, information on the writing process, evaluation process, thematic approach to creative writing, and independent reading).

Where integration was difficult the teachers listed the following reasons:

- 40 per cent of their activity with students is on work habits rather than just academic performance
- only 45 per cent of the information was appropriate to their students (e.g., the I.R.A. Conference was more a book display and the level was too high for Maplewood students)
- there is a problem in the breakdown of periods at the school. The "read aloud" component is in the first 40 minute period and then math in the second. There is not enough time to do everything.

What other resources/materials have you found to be useful?

The major resource used by teachers at Maplewood was the English Language Centre, in particular the services of the Teacher Specially Assigned to the Literacy Project. She brought to staff resource materials which they shared among themselves, ideas from books, and individual copies of useful books. She supplied magazines along with display racks for the classroom, an idea which teachers liked.

In addition to the materials, the TSA suggested and modelled classroom practices and recommended materials available in the English Language Centre library.

Other sources cited were:

- Special Education teachers
- the Reading Part 1 and 2 courses which introduced books and examined their effects on students (e.g., students don't want big print books with "little kid" content) - taught them how to analyze reading for flaws
- the ESL Centre materials and resource library
- special writing folders designed by Maplewood staff for their students with a place for the student's name
- newspapers

- computers - students like to use them but a more qualified teacher is needed
- the staff members involved in the project help each other

Role of the Teacher Specially Assigned

What role has the TSA played in your class? In your school?

When asked whether the role of the TSA in the classroom and in the school differed, the general feeling was that it was one in the same. The teachers indicated five areas of TSA involvement:

1. Classroom Participation
   - in class, doesn't just watch, always finds someone who needs help
   - kids like her
   - I enjoy her time in class and watching her performance of tasks
   - brings out easiness in kids
   - interviewed kids
   - developed a rapport with the students
   - her tone of voice is good - kids respond to her
   - class resource, helps with students

2. Strategies
   - writing process - how to put things down
   - schematic mapping
   - computer set up and writing process
   - helped with different techniques
   - modelling
   - sample lessons

- helps get the kids to present
- a lot of knowledge about computers and how to use them

3. Support

- support person for students and teachers
- never makes you feel bad - never feel patronized
- supportive, finds articles
- a listener
- some days a helper "when you are down she comes in and perks you up"
- major support
- tried too many things and she helped him to focus

4. Evaluator

- helps you evaluate yourself - what works and what doesn't
- observed what was done by teachers and commented
- gives personal evaluation and suggestions
- positive observer

5. Resources

- unlimited resources - "unbelievable"
- helps provide information about meetings, resources, articles, current information
- brought in information, magazines, texts, articles

Are there any things she might have done differently?

Teachers were asked whether there were any things that the TSA might have done differently. The general consensus was "How do you change success?" "What she

has done in the amount of time available is great." "For the first year it was great." "She never tried to direct us but let us find our own way."

The few suggestions given for change were: "modelling a class would be helpful", "spend more classroom time with me", and "perhaps more computer programs for the students".

Future Operation of the Project

What would you like your literacy program objectives to be for the 1991-92 school year?

While some teachers agreed that the objectives they had for the project in its first year should be continued, others were more specific. In particular, they addressed **writing** as a key objective for attention:

- more writing (e.g., daily journal writing without a topic, biweekly computer time)
- more writing practice especially related to word shape
- continue to develop the writing process begun this year, needs a lot of work
- focus more on the actual writing, replace writing speed with accuracy

Additional objectives listed were:

Environment

- create a positive classroom environment (e.g., the neatest room in the whole school)
- continue to develop a positive attitude toward reading

Class Format

- establish 80 minute periods where it will be possible to extend objectives
- have more computers in the programs for all students
- increase time students have within English classes - need English more than anything else
- keep numbers in classes small

Classroom Content

- continue to develop oral language - more student "read aloud" to develop expressive language "to get that voice in your head that reads to you when you read"
- use exercises in penmanship and calligraphy which can lead to better spelling - have grammatical lessons without calling it spelling

Expansion

- involve technical and special education departments to make literacy a total school objective with the head as facilitator and strategy person

Who will be the target students?

There was some uncertainty about whether the students in the program next year would be just the transitional students as was the case this year, or whether the Grade 9 students would be included as well. There was also interest expressed in having the program extended to the technical and special education departments and, ideally, to the whole school.

Exactly who the target students will be has implications for the objectives for the program next year. Ideally, according to one teacher, the Grade 9 students should be involved. The Grade 7 students moving to Grade 8 will be in their second year of the program and will continue to have the support they received this year. The Grade 7 students will be new.

The issue of consistency was raised by another teacher. It would be nice to run a continuum with the same teacher working with the same students throughout their time at Maplewood.

How do you see the role of the TSA in the program next year?

Most teachers wanted the TSA to continue the kind of involvement she had this year:

- her present role was great
- what is happening now is great
- doing an excellent job, a shame to take the best out of the classroom
- continue to add to lunch hour meetings re T1s, thematic units, etc.
- continue to help a lot on the writing process - inservices
- be involved in co-operative planning, collaboration

Some wanted her to increase her activities:

- modelling would be helpful
- want to see her in the classroom setting examples
- do more lessons, units, although is aware that time is a problem
- sit with teacher (e:g., every Wednesday to plan a unit) and work together to accomplish it in one term
- be more into computers with staff and students
- bring more resources
- be here more, be here full time

One staff member saw the TSA reducing activities:

- not here as often
- become a resource person, trouble shooter

- be an information person - sample lessons periodically, not to the same degree as this year

What would you like to find out from the research into the literacy project?

Teachers listed several areas related to research. In a general way, they hoped that they could become more knowledgeable about existing research. They wanted to have information about:

- similar programs that have worked
- some of the more untraditional ways that will work (e.g., a more active classroom is a more productive classroom, not just chaos)
- any new research re teaching strategies
- what strategies work with these students, what will interest them?

They also raised a number of questions that might be addressed specifically in the Maplewood project:

- kids are starting to get more out of school - what has changed?
- what proof do we have that the program is working (e.g., fewer dropouts)?
- is the attendance of this year's Grade 8 students better than that of the older students (track attendance)?
- have we made a difference? - are the students better behaved?
- has the attitude of students toward literacy/reading changed?
- have we increased the cognitive ability of students down the road? (perhaps only initial testing now for comparison purposes later)
- how are teachers relating to the students' behaviour?
- do students have more respect for teachers?
- are students better able to communicate with each other without the teacher's help?

- are the students satisfied with their year? how do they feel about themselves? (overall evaluation of their year's work from the students)
- do the staff and students have the same needs and problems?
- are we able to evaluate strategies and come up with a battery of tests?
- what is our goal for five years from now?
- is this work going to make a difference and how do people feel about the process?
- what will happen if the students who come into Grade 7 next year are totally different?

Some questions dealt with personal growth:

- can I have some indication that the way I teach works?
- can I improve my efficiency in teaching reading? (many things interrupt the process)
- is there more I can do given the time constraints? (40 minute periods or track events)
- how can I improve the continuity of learning? (now I have to backtrack when there is a break)

Finally, there was one question raised about the literacy projects generally:

- how are our students working in relation to Osler? (compare the two programs)

Comments

At the end of the interview, teachers were given the opportunity to make additional comments.

- want staff library in the school with information regarding reading strategies or what is happening on the reading scene
- would like books to be interpreted into workshops so they will be used (insurance)

- where is the commitment to change?
- have teachers spend time assessing their level of commitment to whole language - write up on whole language events in their classes
- now we have spent all the money it has to be followed through
- everything worked well this year
- teachers should have more access to materials and new ideas unknown at this point
- want more frequent visits from TSA
- independent reading, themes, artwork, language across the curriculum are all good things to be continued
- continued involvement of administration
- everyone appears to be very supportive in the program - nice to have

2. Maplewood Administrator Interviews

Program Objectives

What were your objectives for the literacy project this year?

Generally, the objectives cited by the administrators were related to literacy, specifically to reading and writing: "teach these kids to read and write", "improve reading and writing skills in those who can write". While doing this, one administrator hoped that the students would realize the staff was helping them to accomplish something.

While the efforts have been focussed on the transitional students, the administrators had hoped to spread the literacy project to other departments this year. "It should be across all disciplines". However, the staff is not ready yet; "realistically it takes more time". They are currently starting to work with the technical people. "We all should be addressing literacy."

Professional Development and Other Resources

Have you received any P.A./staff development with respect to the literacy project?

Not being a reading specialist, one administrator learned about strategies and process writing to be used with these students from the English Language Centre staff. She was also involved in the development of a unit with the English Department and found it to be a "new, stimulating experience" for both her and the staff.

The second administrator is more in the position of supporting the literacy project staff by doing duty in the office for staff members so they could attend related workshops. She does have the background in literacy and for her, it has always been a priority and a commitment.

Have you provided staff development activities/programs related to the literacy project?

Currently, they ensure that time is provided for the staff to attend staff development activities/programs by looking after their duties in the school. Not that much time is required, but it should be seen as a team effort. Passing relevant information that crosses her desk to the appropriate people is part of one administrator's role.

The English Language Centre staff has been doing a "wonderful job" for the moment; however, more inschool inservices will be needed when literacy spreads to other departments. The English Language Centre staff has been informed about their staff needs. In the meantime, the literacy project was included in the school-based staff development plan.

What sources of support/materials have you used in the implementation of the program?

Internally, the administrators collected readings and information on computer-assisted reading materials that may be good for motor difficulties, from the English Language Centre staff, the Academic Department Head, and the Computers in Education staff.

Outside of Scarborough, they have involved MaryLou Soutar-Hynes from the Ministry in workshops, not as part of her present job description, but because of her previous relationship with Scarborough.

A couple of articles were also helpful: "Our Schools Ourselves" produced in April, 1991, and an issue of the Kappan that highlighted literacy. These were shared with staff members.

Role of the Teacher Specially Assigned

How do you see the role of the TSA this year? Next year?

The administrators stated that the TSA was "phenomenal" **this year**, did a super job understanding the needs of the staff members, and supporting them during the implementation of the project. The job involved working with teachers to develop strategies for the classrooms, assisting teachers in preparing curricula, and helping them to gain access to resource materials. In return, the staff feels very comfortable with her.

Next year, they plan to include technical education and special education programs in the literacy project. The staff members teaching these programs will need the support of the TSA.

A change in the TSA's relationship with the current literacy project staff expressed by one administrator was that the role would become one of a master teacher: a role model for different subject areas, and a resource person for the current staff in the academic areas.

The comment made by the second administrator was that the TSA role seems to working well, with positive chemistry having been established. In view of this, there seems to be no reason to change.

Future Operation of the Project

What are your objectives for the literacy project next year?

A main objective of both administrators, as discussed previously, was to expand the literacy program to technical and special education. The teachers in the adult program should also be brought on board. There is not a formalized curriculum for this program but literacy should be addressed.

Ultimately, the whole school should be involved in an "interdisciplinary" approach to literacy. This increased involvement could be staggered over a set time period to bring subjects on board at different times. Support will be needed from the English Language Centre in this endeavour.

A second objective cited by one administrator was to increase staff development related to computer use. Furthermore, easier access to computers for students could be provided by creating some kind of space with a lab. Perhaps a few more computers could be placed in the Resource Centre for students to use at lunch and before and after school.

A final objective listed by one administrator was to offer the Reading Part 1 course at Maplewood. This might encourage staff to take the course. This was tried last year, but there was not enough interest expressed.

What would you like to find out from the research into the literacy project next year?

This year was a trial and error one with no set program. Teachers, through experimentation, have had to become "reflective practitioners".

The major research question is: are we improving reading, writing, and comprehension? That is, are we having an effect or are we dealing with students who will continue to have difficulty learning? Not only does the staff need this validation, but also good results will be good for the school and lead back to positive reinforcement and self-esteem for students. Furthermore, these results would justify the amount of money being spent on students with major difficulties in learning.

With students at this level, progress is more nebulous. Administrators are looking at a lot of growth down the road.

Additional research questions are:

- Did this year make teachers want to try different things, regardless of the success?
- What else should we have done this year, knowing what we know now? (other strategies)
- "What is the literature breaking from current research in this area?"

Comments

At the end of the interview, the administrators were given the opportunity to comment. Overall, the timing was right for Maplewood to be in a literacy project. Osler was also interested as it was a "last ditch" effort for the students. However, there is a large percentage of students at the level of the high school students across Scarborough. They have "just slipped through the cracks".

The fact that the opportunity was given, even though long overdue, should be commended. The support they got from the Board and the school staff was wonderful when embarking on a project that could "go either way in terms of success". They had a beginning need of $3000 from the Board and got "much, much more" through Program Department. It was also very important that research was involved.

They were able to hire new teachers this year because of enrolment; therefore, it was possible to bring in people who are buying into the program. For the present staff, it became a selling job to get them to participate. "We have the program, you must buy in". Overall, the staff took the risks and worked hard, even the long term teachers.

3. Program Department Staff Interviews

Three of the four Program Department staff members were from the English Language Centre; the fourth being a representative from administration. While their degree of involvement in the Literacy Project varied greatly, there were still many commonalities in the topics of their responses to the questions asked. However, their perspectives were often varied.

Program Objectives

What were your objectives for the literacy project this year?

The major objective of the respondents was to create awareness/knowledge among teachers regarding whole language: strategies, materials, information, and evaluation methods:

- refresh or make people aware of current strategies or practices within reading
- expose people to new material especially for their own learning (need to talk to integrate)
- provide them with a "literacy project update" to let them know what has happened
- provide information to teachers; visit publishers for teachers and pass along information
- promote evaluation as part of the learning process and look at different methods of evaluation
- plant seeds in the writing process
- teach English teachers how to get involved in a quality reading program
- ensure that teachers gain enough knowledge to implement the program so students will become better readers; provide them with expert knowledge of the reading/writing process
- train staff members so they become resource people

A second objective was to provide modelling of strategies in class:

- get in class and touch base with kids to get a sense of the clientele to build a bridge between teachers' and kids' level of functioning (e.g., modelling "talk through")
- establish relationships with teachers and work as a facilitator as the teacher should be (i.e., modelling interaction with teachers; updating self as teachers should be updating themselves to be a source for kids)
- help teachers become comfortable with Program Department facilitating the learning process

Raising the literacy and self-esteem levels of students was a third objective:

- raise literacy level of students
- find ways of raising students' self-esteem through literacy was a specific objective of Maplewood High School
- improve students' reading and writing

The objectives from the original literacy project were carried out or consolidated in the current project. It was the task of Program staff to ensure that events kept going in the direction in which they started and that the focus on the reading and writing processes continued.

In the meantime, staff recognized that the groups in the schools would need training in more areas than just literacy (e.g., CRDI, writing process, evaluation). The collaborative approach is one method through which objectives can be achieved together.

Professional Development and Other Resources

Have you received any PA/staff development with respect to the literacy project?

Two of the Program Department staff had received no staff development specifically related to the literacy project. A third attended events not especially related to literacy. There are "larger processes that provide vehicles through which people can put things into effect, establish goals, and maintain order and direction (e.g., CRDI at Eaton Hall, Pratt seminar, Scarborough inservice on evaluation - Neil Graham, and conferences and conventions on staff development). These events contribute to the organizational process when "you can't have a direct hand in this from the school point of view".

The remaining staff member attended literacy-related conferences held by the International Reading Association, the Ontario Reading Association, Basic Level's - "Concern's 90", "Literature Alive" held by Scholastic books (Grade 7-8 "read aloud"), and a course on evaluation hosted by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. In addition to these external conferences, the Program Department's staff development program on running workshops was helpful. Participants shared anxieties regarding going into schools as part of their role. These staff development events were useful for personal understanding and affirmed the staff member's personal philosophy of literacy. It became clear that it is possible for teachers to create an environment as a motivating influence rather than controlling students.

Have you provided staff development activities/programs related to the literacy project?

While it is necessary to share information regarding activities/programs with the participants on any project, the process should occur only when people are ready and willing so they do not feel "stepped on". When the sharing of ideas occurs, it is only "baby steps" at

this point in time. During the school day, staff members are rushed because of the number of things happening. People can't listen if they are too busy.

Many of the staff development activities were held at the English Language Centre: co-operative planning regarding "Language Matters", sharing experiences, CRDI, evaluation, working collaboratively, and whole language strategies.

"There is not enough staff development in their own areas; it is more at the system level, particularly in reading and math. Teachers must understand how students learn and develop conceptual knowledge of the stages." This must be ongoing and should combine conferences with lots of inhouse development (e.g., reading, discussion). There is a "danger of rejecting new information; staff needs input constantly". "It is important to try to get people to keep open minds and to respect the work of other people."

What sources of support/materials have you used in the implementation of the program?

Three of the four Program Department staff members provided input with respect to resources they used. The role of the fourth staff member is that of a facilitator and in that capacity this question did not apply.

The **materials** discussed by the participants were:

- "Language Matters" as a clear, concise base
- "Reading Teacher" journal
- JK-6 Centre's vertical file
- information from the Reading Specialist course in the winter

- articles from the Language and Research Centres on such topics as adult basic literacy
- ESL - share materials
- publishers' reading materials
- materials from Oxford University Press to be developed more in keeping with needs of basic level. There are not many materials for kids who don't read well, appropriate to their interest
- display board for books - change in environment as well as strategies
- "Creating Classrooms for Authors" provided basis for inservices with both staffs last June
- "Southam Report" - staff member doesn't agree with a lot of information on literacy
- "International Literacy Year" Ministry reports helped set a context for what they are doing. It is a disabling thing not to be able to read.
- "Journal of Reading"

People who served as **resource people** for the Program staff responding were:

- Language Centre staff
- ESL staff
- Don Robb - green light for Literacy Project and provides input and money
- Rollit Goldring - not active in the program but provides support
- Barb Howes, TSA on site, is an important resource and a link to all people outside of the school
- MaryLou Soutar-Hynes, former Scarborough staff member, re writing process
- Judy Clarke, Values Education, re collaborative learning
- John MacInnis at Nelson re writing and talking - using the language experience approach with older kids

Role of the Teacher Specially Assigned

How do you see the role of the TSA this year? Next year?

This year, the Program staff saw the role of the TSA as an integral part of the Literacy Project working with school staff in the following ways:

- modelling teaching, a guide and a support
- working as a facilitator with teachers, an observer letting teachers know what they are doing with kids
- providing feedback to staff members re input of others (e.g., administration)
- working with teachers in June to develop final proposal
- visiting publishers
- transforming role as time passes
- providing information regarding what is happening related to objectives
- making it clear to the staff in both sites that this support is not just lip service; the resources are where the mouth is
- developing a relationship over time with teachers - trust
- acting as a safety net. Change doesn't always go well initially.

Next year, there were patterns suggested that were common to the two schools, and some that were unique. The **common elements** of the role of the TSA according to Program Department staff members were:

- working with the schools to set clear objectives which will help to clarify the role further - collaboration
- working with teachers to help them understand their role
- having more involvement with teachers in the literacy program
- following a concrete plan of action with staff regarding the literacy project

- TSA is responsible for two schools for only 50 per cent of her time. The other 50 per cent is occupied with other duties. This is too demanding for one person to do. Now the school staff will be involved in the maintenance of what they have implemented and will engage more in reflection with the TSA.

- working with staff in the refinement of the program that comes from reflection

The two Scarborough high schools themselves differ and this will determine to a large degree the role of the TSA in each school next year. Maplewood staff members are immersing themselves in whole language. The school will have some staff changes, but it is hoped that there will be a nucleus of people who will be involved. Furthermore, changes are planned in timetabling. The staff's objectives for the program are to be set in June which may result in a clearer focus in terms of actual student outcomes. The TSA will still operate as she did this year but with more direct contact with the classes and staff.

Future Operation of the Project

What are your objectives for the literacy project next year?

The objectives in place were seen by all Program staff interviewed as continuing. Much discussion centred around **refining and focussing** them.

- research is forcing thought on the objective and establishing parameters. This can provide direction and information regarding perceptions.

- help teachers focus more on what they did in class and how it fits with their objectives

- the staff will consider what happened this year and set objectives for next year this June

- literacy will be the primary focus of the school

Some input was given with respect to **materials**.

- bring materials into the school
- continue the program at a high level with continued support from the Program Department
- extend focus on literacy and keep environment rich in texts, etc.

Other objectives centred around collecting evidence that showed that by the end of 1991-92, the program will be working and the kids will be more functionally literate. A final point was that with the transition years issue, the timing has been perfect for this study. These two issues could be pulled together next year.

A few objectives listed related to Maplewood specifically were:

- work with the school in curriculum development, writing, process, and evaluation, and have these in place by the end of next year to fulfil curriculum literacy
- have timetables to allow for this work - back-to-back 40 minute periods. The current pattern is English followed by math followed by reading. A version of the 80 minute period would provide more continuity and consistency. The program now tends to be fragmented.
- can do the program in split periods but need experienced teachers

What would you like to find out from the research into the literacy project next year?

Some comments were made about the research methodology used this year. One staff member felt that the interviews would give a more detailed and personal appraisal of what people are doing and should provide interesting results. The way research defined its role as it goes along was appreciated. It was responding to need rather than a preconceived idea or format.

Continued research as a support and providing information allows the teachers to become reflective practitioners. The reflections they articulate are used by research to provide valuable feedback for decision making. It provides a basis for communication and works in concert with other aspects of the program to provide a pathway. This perspective can aid decision making and give a better sense of direction. "If people don't know why you are here, how can they ask questions?"

Specific questions to be investigated by the research were:

- how do administrators perceive the project and the role of the TSA?
- what are their expectation for the role next year?
- what instruments can be used to assess student and teacher progress other than just personal perceptions? (try to make subjectivity more objective)
- have teachers improved their skills in delivery of the literacy program? Are they better professionals?
- is the program in place working? Are children improving their reading and writing?
- have we changed teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour regarding teaching reading and writing to these students?
- are there any attitudinal changes among teachers and students?
- how do teachers feel about literacy and their role?
- has their knowledge base changed in literacy learning?
- what are the changes in the administrators' views of the literacy project?
- have vice-principals taken on a more realistic view re the learning process of teachers?

Comments

The Program Department staff being interviewed were invited to make additional comments:

- while research has clarified direction and forced focussing of teachers, it still feels like a judgmental experience - but this is part of learning
- hope teachers and administrators are aware that this is a "feeling out" year and while there is no cut and dried development, things have been changing slowly
- in schools already loaded with innovations some things have to be removed ("planned abandonment") to allow for new programs. People can feel overworked doing everything and the literacy project is even changing class format. What will be eliminated from the agenda?
- outcome-based program - can we identify what learned outcomes should be and map back to strategies and objectives to ensure outcomes?
- this has been important. The evolution of it has been strange but has created a good relationship and good support for staff
- the secondary school community needs to know that it is okay and respectable to get help for teaching reading. This has brought the two panels closer together. Furthermore, the two high schools are now represented at heads meeting
- with the high school heads attending heads' meetings, the schools are involved and they have the opportunity to seek knowledge and support for their problems.
- our mission statement states that we are life long learners. This means staff as well.
- the exercise has been very positive for schools and for the system
- the hope is that the Literacy Project keeps going long enough that it becomes built in to the way these schools operate: part of the curriculum, the natural and normal thing to do

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

There was a consistent broad **objective** held by teachers and school administrators involved in the literacy project which stressed helping the students become confident, successful readers and writers. Specifically, teachers focussed on developing oral communication, writing, reading, and comprehension. Program Department staff echoed this emphasis by stressing the support and training of teachers in the reading/writing process. Overall, their major objective was to create awareness/knowledge among teachers regarding whole language: strategies, materials, information, and evaluation methods. Through this they hoped to raise the literacy and self-esteem levels of students. While the school administrators had hoped to spread the literacy project to other departments, they recognized that "realistically it takes more time". Program staff also recognized that the groups in the school would need training in areas other than literacy such as CRDI, writing process, and evaluation.

The **students** involved in the literacy project were the "transitional students", that is Grade 7 and 8 students ranging in age from 12 to 14, with a reading ability level of approximately Grade 2 and often little or no writing ability. Generally, these students are poor readers selected for reading classes to improve reading ability and attitudes who tend to be very immature with very poor self esteem. Overall, they are students who are dependent learners needing reassurance.

There did not appear to be one or two major **instructional strategies** that teachers used with these students; rather it was an eclectic approach centring around the four specific objectives selected. Generally, they believed the strategies they were using to implement the

objectives were working based on the positive response from students. For example, the students were more attentive and quiet while being read to; asked to be read to again; took books home and magazines disappeared from the shelf; increased their computer use; were interested in getting their results; and, displayed more self control in their behaviour.

Those **strategies** that **did not work** were varied. They included, for example, the formal practice of asking questions for reading comprehension; schematic mapping; having students make speeches; and, independent study. Seating arrangement was discussed as an issue that has problems but could be improved. Students had difficulty working in pairs or groups initially, but gradually began to work together.

A general explanation regarding why some strategies did not work centred around the characteristics of the students. They need a lot of modelling and have to be shown exactly what is expected of them on a ongoing basis.

The **methods** teachers developed to collect evaluative information from students to determine whether they benefitted from their classroom objectives in the literacy program were mainly: teacher recording and observation. Generally these methods appeared to work. However, the question/answer method in written responses and comprehension questions worked best with these students in the end since they recognized it was a test and they would sit there and do it.

Some **problems** arose with peer evaluation because students were reluctant to make comments about each other and had trouble using the form. In addition, there was a lack of understanding regarding the purpose of the writing folder and a problem with students not always recording what they read.

All staff members and school administrators have attended **staff development** activities within their school and literacy workshops at the English Language Centre. Most have gone to Scarborough-wide or Ontario-wide conferences. In most cases, they could integrate some elements from the conferences into their classrooms. However, since 40 per cent of their activities with students was spent on work habits rather than just academic performance, and because of the organization of the 40 minute periods at the school, there was not enough time to do everything. The school administrators tried to provide school staff with the flexibility to attend staff development events. Furthermore, any relevant literacy information was distributed to them.

Since the orientation of the program staff members was more towards the organizational process, their staff development tended to address "the larger processes that provide vehicles through which people can put things into practice". The TSA was most involved in literacy-related conferences since the role gave direct opportunities for feedback to both school and Program staff.

There was no question that the English Language Centre was the major **resource** used by teachers and school administrators at Maplewood, in particular the Teacher Specially Assigned to the Literacy Project. The Centre provided literacy workshops and the TSA

brought resource materials which were shared by the staff members. She supplied magazines along with display rack for the classroom. The TSA also suggested and modelled classroom practices and recommended materials available in the English Language Centre library. In addition, the Reading Part 1 and 2 courses provided useful information.

Also cited as useful were the special writing folders designed by Maplewood staff for their students and the computers. Furthermore, the staff members involved in the project provided a resource for each other.

A variety of resources were cited by Program Department staff: "Language Matters", "Reading Teacher" journal, ESL Centre, and the "Journal of Reading" just to name a few. In addition, they listed several resource people: for example, Language Centre staff, Program Department administrators, ESL staff, the TSA involved in the project, and Values Education staff.

Teachers, school administrators, and Program Department staff saw the **role of the TSA this year** as including: classroom participation, strategies, support, evaluation, and resources. All participants in the school appreciated her approach and skills with themselves and their students this year and requested more time from her in modelling a class and providing computer experiences for the students and staff.

When asked about their **objectives for next year** all three groups agreed that the objectives they had for the project in its first year should be continued. Some were more specific. In particular, they selected **writing** as a key objective for attention. Some

additional objectives listed by teachers and school administrators were: environment (i.e., creating a positive classroom environment); class format (i.e., establish 80 minute periods, more computers, smaller numbers of classes); classroom content (i.e., continue to develop oral language and use exercises in penmanship); and, expansion of the project into the technical and special education departments. One administrator added that offering the Reading Part 1 course at the school might encourage staff to participate.

The objectives of the Program staff for next year centred around refining and focussing this years' objectives. To assist in this process, more materials will be provided to "keep the environment rich in texts, etc". Furthermore, they will work with the staff on curriculum development, writing process, and evaluation. The bottom line will be to collect evidence that the program is working and that the students are more functionally literate.

There was some uncertainty about whether the **students** in the program **next year** would be just the transitional students or whether the Grade 9 students would be included as well. Exactly who the target students will be has implications for the program objectives next year.

Most teachers wanted the **role of the TSA** to be the same **next year**. However, some wanted her to add, for example, modelling, sample lessons, and more computer work to her agenda. One staff member did see her reducing her activities and becoming a resource person and trouble shooter, doing sample lessons periodically during the year.

The school administrators plan to include both technical and special education programs in the literacy project next year. The people in these programs will need the support of the TSA. For the current teachers, the TSA role next year will be that of a master teacher and a resource person.

In the view of Program staff members, the TSA will help schools set objectives, work with staff to help them understand their role, assist them in the maintenance of what they have implemented and in the refinement their program. Since only 50 per cent of the TSA's time has been allotted for the literacy project in the two schools, the job will be very demanding.

Teachers would like to become more knowledgeable about existing research in the field of literacy, similar programs that have worked, and new research regarding teaching strategies that will work with these students. They also raised a number of questions that might be addressed during the Maplewood Literacy Project with respect to students' development and teachers' personal growth.

Continued research into the project was seen by school administrators and Program staff as providing support and information to allow the teacher to become a reflective practitioner. This can "provide a basis for communication and can work in concert with other aspects of the program to provide a pathway". The major question remains: "are we improving reading, writing, and comprehension?"

FUTURE PLANS

The results of this study will be discussed with the Maplewood staff at the end of the school year to enable the staff to map out various aspects of the literacy project for the 1991-92 school year. This will be done with members from the English Language Centre and the Research Centre present. It is hoped that together a final plan for the research will be developed.